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A

LETTER

TO THE

HON. HORACE MANN,

BY

CHARLES ASTOR BRISTED,

LATE FOUNDATION SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, AND
ONE OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE ASTOR LIBRARY.

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1918

J. P. Wright, Printer,
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LETTER.

To the Honorable Horace Mann:

SIR,

Since even under the aristocratic governments of the Old World, a cat is proverbially permitted to look at a king, much more, in this land of democracy, may a private individual address without previous introduction a Member of Congress. Undeniable is it, that our private individuals have not been slow to use and abuse this privilege, and numbers of them make it their business to bother public men on all occasions, in or out of season. Nor should I have been willing to follow so many bad examples, had you not, in some sense, yourself given the provocation.

Some two months ago I happened to see in the *Literary World*, a brief and complimentary notice of your "Thoughts for a Young Man," which mentioned your holding up Stephen Girard as an example, and John Jacob Astor as a warning. The latter gentleman was my maternal grandfa-

ther, and having been accustomed to look upon him during his life, and to regard his memory since his death, with a considerable amount of respect, I naturally felt a little curious to see what he had done to be held up as a warning, particularly what legal or moral crime he had committed to make you put him in the same category with the ferocious despot Nicholas, or that prince of swindlers, the ex-railroad king, George Hudson—as the same journal informed me you did. True, in the course of twelve years or more, during which time I had sufficient opportunities of becoming acquainted with his life and character, I had never seen or heard anything to induce the suspicion of such a probability; nevertheless, as it is notorious that we often learn a great deal about ourselves and our private affairs from strangers, it seemed not impossible that some such information might be obtained in the present instance.

Of Stephen Girard, I knew only that he had been the richest man, or one of the richest men, in the country; that he was a Frenchman by birth, but had lived most of his life—a very solitary one, without near relations or friends—in Philadelphia; that he left the greater part of his fortune to establish a college for orphans, into which no minister of any religious denomination was ever to set foot, under any pretext or circumstance

whatsoever—which always struck me as a very ingenious diabolical contrivance for the increase of knowledge without virtue; and that the college had been but lately opened, after a delay of some fifteen years. Nor did I gain any further details from your "Thoughts." But I did learn the *gravamen* of Mr. Astor's offence in your eyes, viz. that he did not leave more than one-sixteenth of his fortune for any public purpose; conduct, which you profess yourself unable to palliate or account for except on the supposition of absolute insanity,—(p. 65, *note.*)

Now, calling a man "insane," like calling him *scoundrel, rascal* or *vagabond,* is a very convenient way to dispose of people whom we do not like, while we are unable to substantiate anything specific against them; but it is a weapon which cuts more ways than one, and the hasty or indiscreet resort to which it is somewhat dangerous to encourage. Different men have different ideas as to what constitutes this sort of insanity. For instance, when you make an abolition speech in Congress, the Southern and Southwestern representatives would doubtless be much delighted to shave your head and enclose you between the four walls of an asylum, and would be prepared with a wilderness of arguments, enough to convince themselves at least, if no one else, that you fully deserved such

treatment. Or when, six or seven years ago, you took occasion in a public discourse to speak very disrespectfully of the ballot and universal suffrage, I will engage there was no want of persons who said you must be crazy to blaspheme institutions which to them were like an appendix to the Ten Commandments. A great many very sensible, though perhaps common-place people, agree in thinking that the Massachusetts transcendentalists have been made mad—whether by too much learning or not, they are less unanimous. I have no doubt we could find many devout men, who would say that, to found an institution for education from which all ministers of the gospel were systematically excluded, was little short of the act of a madman. In fine, there is a popular tendency to confound, by a loose use of language, *madness* with *unreasonableness* or *folly;* and in some cases to aggravate, in others to excuse actions, by assigning to them as a motive, insanity, when at most they can only come under the charge of irrationality, and very often are referable only to eccentricity or peculiarity. Yet the distinction is not so very subtle or metaphysical either—one would think it simple enough. You may say that a drunken man is mad for the time; that a very angry man is so too. Possibly, but you would surely never say in any serious con-

versation or writing, that a man was *insane* according to any legal or medical sense of the term, because you had once seen him in a violent passion, nor yet because you had once seen him intoxicated. Every man who commits a crime, nay, every man who wittingly and deliberately commits sin, or acts occasionally contrary to the dictates of reason, such a man's mind is not, therefore, permanently disordered, otherwise, what a great madhouse the whole world would make! But the mention of *crime* leads me to the real cause of this abuse of words. The morbid sympathy shown by a certain class of philanthropists for criminals, and especially for the more atrocious criminals, such as murderers, has, among ways of screening such wretches from condign punishment, suggested the plea of insanity. In this our sentimentalists are greatly aided by the craniologists, many of whose speculations go directly to refer all great crimes to defective mental organization. The public mind thus becomes accustomed to associate with ideas of permanent insanity, individual acts of great wickedness or irrationality. A clever legal friend of mine seriously professes a theory that every person is a monomaniac, or mad upon some one point, by which he probably means to say that every person has a weak point on which he has a tendency or susceptibility to be led astray and at times act irrationally.

I suppose then, your saying that Mr. A.'s only excuse for leaving his fortune to his relations instead of to the public, is to be found in the supposition of his insanity,—is only a characteristically exaggerated way of expressing that you think he made a foolish and unreasonable disposition of it. Mr. Girard, on the contrary, is lauded with equal extravagance for the establishment of his college to promote irreligious education among orphans, as opening a fountain of blessedness so copious and exhaustless that it will flow on undiminished to the end of time—(p. 64.) To judge of the value and justice of this condemnation and this laudation, it will be necessary to look at the lives and circumstances of the two men, very briefly, but rather more in detail than you have done.

I have taken the trouble to make myself somewhat acquainted with the history of Mr. Girard, and more particularly with the history of his college since his death. The difficulty of procuring the necessary documents has delayed for many weeks the appearance of this little epistle, which would otherwise have been laid before you a few days after your book fell into my hands.

Stephen Girard was a native of France, but a citizen, and for many years a resident of Philadelphia. He was a bachelor, and had no near relatives except a brother, with whom he was not

on the best terms. He lived unsocially, and was as frugal of the ordinary courtesies of life as of his gold. As a merchant and banker, he accumulated a large fortune, variously estimated, but certainly not less than seven or eight millions of dollars. It does not appear that he ever entertained the idea of distinguishing himself in any other walk of life. Dying without intimate friends, he left his whole property, with the exception of a few trifling legacies, to establish a college for orphans, *within the premises appropriated to which no ecclesiastic, missionary, or minister of any sect whatsoever, is ever to be admitted for any purpose.** The plan, material, and dimensions of the collegiate buildings were most particularly specified, but insuperable architectural difficulties prevented these directions from being carried out to the letter. To support the roof of the main building, it was necessary to erect a portico of Corinthian columns—a lucky necessity, as it enabled the architect to convert a very plain into a very splendid exterior. For fifteen years the college was in embryo, owing partly to these architectural difficulties, and partly to others, some of which I cannot find prominent allusion to in any of the reports or documents emanating from the institution. There

* See the ninth subdivision of the twenty-first clause of his will.

have been rumors of obstinate and protracted litigations, but since about these κλέος οἷον ακούομεν, I know nothing about them except from hearsay, we may pass them briefly over. One might suspect without being very superstitious, that these delays were the first judgment of the Almighty on an institution established in defiance of him. At any rate, let one thing be borne in mind,—the college has only been in operation two years. All your fine talk therefore about "opening a fountain of blessedness," &c. is quite gratuitous, being founded, not on any actual experience or observation of the workings of this particular instance, but on the general assumption, that the acquisition of knowledge or mental improvement must necessarily in all cases be a blessing, which is notoriously a disputed point. If we come to *à priori* reasoning on the matter, it might be urged with quite as much plausibility, that an educational institution based on such a principle as the systematic exclusion of all definite Christianity, could not, from its very nature, prosper. Indeed, this clause has been a great stumbling block to the various eulogists of Mr. Girard, and it is painfully amusing to see the various attempts they make to gloss it over. They lay great stress on the fact, that he does not express any hostility to Christianity, but only a fear of the "clashing doctrines"

and "controversy" of "such a multitude of sects." Now, as Christianity is made up of the various denominations of Christians, this is something like cutting off a man's limbs piecemeal while professing not to hurt the man himself. The children are to be brought up "sober, truthful, industrious," "according to the purest principles of morality;"* there is nothing said about their being brought up *Christians*, and certainly they are *not* to be brought up according to the tenets of any denomination or denominations of Christians, all such teaching being stringently excluded from the college. And as all Christians belong to *some* denomination, if Mr. Girard intended that his scholars should be Christians, either he must have looked forward to their constituting a sect of their own, or he must have had some idea of a *general Christian*, without any distinctive rites or theological opinions, like the *general man* of Plato, and those who, after him, believed in the independent existence of general ideas apart from their individual attributes—which is a very ingenious metaphysical notion (though even as that, it is now pretty much exploded,) but not to be carried out, or conceived of as able to be carried out, in real practical life. It is possible that one of these

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* See the same clause of the will.

alternatives may have been in Stephen Girard's mind; it is more probable that, not being really a Christian, he did not see the use of Christianity, while, as a keen practical man, he had a sharp eye for the abuses of sectarian polemics. Industry, temperance, veracity, all the *business* virtues, he adored, but had not sufficiently enlightened views to perceive the intimate dependence of "the purest principles of morality" on the Christian religion. Hence his scheme of turning all clergymen bodily out of the college, because different sects have a tendency to wrangle, which seems to me about on a par with the conduct of a man who should found an asylum, and because there are Allopaths, and Homœopaths, and Hydropaths, and various other paths and ways of killing and curing, the followers of which are accustomed to abuse one another respectively, should prohibit every M. D. whatsoever from entering the premises of the said asylum.

One effect of this restriction, I think, must be obvious to any one who considers the matter seriously. It has a perilous tendency to give the scholars a prejudice against all clergymen. These orphans are fed, clothed, and taught gratuitously, they naturally are grateful to their benefactor, and learn to respect his memory and value his opinions. They find out that no ministers of

the Gospel are allowed to enter the college. If they inquire into the reason of this prohibition, it will reach their minds in some such form as this—that it was because ministers of different sects are apt to quarrel. I do not see how the *prestige* can be otherwise than unfavorable. As Mr. G. intended that the children should be left to "adopt such religious tenets as their maturer reason might enable them to prefer," he probably was afraid of their acquiring a prejudice in favor of some denomination while at college, which would be most effectively prevented by giving them an impartial prejudice *against* the ministers of *all* denominations.

One word more before taking leave of Stephen Girard. The desire of immortality embraces this world as well as the next. Man longs to perpetuate his name upon earth. Most of us οἱ πολλοί seek to do it in the way alluded to by Plato. Great spirits do it by splendid achievements of genius. Girard was not in a position to continue his name and memory by either of these methods. He had no family; he was not a distinguished man in politics, science, or literature. All his greatness consisted in his fortune. This, and his name in connection with it, he could preserve only by leaving it for some public object; and the disposition which he did make of it, for

the instruction of men's minds to the neglect of their souls, was not exactly the best conceivable, nor the most likely to "open a fountain of blessedness to the end of time."

John Jacob Astor, like Stephen Girard, was a foreigner, who settled in this country and made a large fortune by mercantile pursuits. Unlike him, he had a family; unlike him, too, he aspired to be something more than a mere man of business. Though not a liberally educated man, he enjoyed the society of literary men; though possessing no extraordinary means of political information or training, he saw further into the interests, capacities, and destiny of the country of his adoption, than those who were at the head of the government. He had visions of founding a great colony, and these visions were only prevented becoming realities by the short-sightedness of our rulers. It would be superfluous for me to dilate upon the circumstances of his Pacific expedition and settlement: they have already been celebrated by the one man in America most capable of doing them justice. Mr. Astor asked of the government but one sloop of war and a lieutenant's commission for himself; with these he promised to defend the territory since so famous as the Oregon, and he could have done it, for the aborigines there were then our friends. Our government did not

see the importance of the region, and suffered it to be captured by the British, and afterwards, under the treaty of joint occupation, to fall virtually into the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company, who acquired the confidence of and control over the natives. The consequences of this oversight were, first, that during a period of nearly thirty years enormous profits, which would otherwise have accrued to American citizens, flowed into the pockets of British subjects; and, secondly, that at the end of that time the question of disputed territory tore open old wounds, revived the worst animosities which had been rapidly dying away, and nearly involved the two countries in a terrible war. The clear head which would have prevented these losses and mischiefs distinctly foresaw them. After the treaty of Ghent was concluded, Mr. Astor said to his friend, Albert Gallatin, "I am very much pleased with all that you, gentlemen, [the Commissioners,] have *done*, but there are some things which you ought not to have left *undone*. You should have settled more definitely the question of the Columbia territory." Mr. Gallatin was a most able and long-headed man, but even he did not appreciate the correctness of his friend's views, and attributed to personal feelings the importance which Mr. A. attached to the subject. He answered with a smile,

"Never mind, Mr. Astor, it will be time enough for our great-grandchildren to talk about that in two hundred years." "If we live," replied the other, "we shall see trouble about it in less than forty years." He lived to see his prediction verified within the given time. And this is the man whom you represent as a mere skinflint, who had no idea beyond his money-bags.

When Mr. Astor found that his efforts for the public benefit were not understood, he did what it would be well if more people did now-a-days—he confined himself to his own business, and by it amassed a fortune, stated by his executors to be a little less, but generally presumed to be a little more than eight millions of dollars. Of this he bequeathed the great bulk to his eldest son, a respectable competence to his daughter and grandchildren, fifty thousand dollars to the poor of his native village in Germany, and four hundred thousand for the establishment of a public library in this city.

It is not generally considered that Mr. Astor's will was in all respects an equitable one, and I certainly should be the last to maintain that it was. I do believe, however, that he intended to provide handsomely for all his near relatives, but that, during the latter years of his life, when his bodily infirmities prevented him from taking note of mat-

ters that did not fall immediately under his daily observation at home, he was imposed upon by lawyers and other designing men. Be this as it may, it has nothing to do with the question between us, for you do not blame John Jacob Astor because he left too little to some of his relatives, but because he left anything to any of them.

To return, then, to the Astor Library. It is very easy to sneer at a bequest of "only half a million, or less than half a million of dollars;" words cost nothing, and any man can afford to be liberal of another's property. But I maintain that the endowment is not a despicable one, whether considered positively in itself or comparatively with reference to Mr. Astor's fortune. It is not an every-day occurrence for a man to leave even one-sixteenth of his property to the public, and the sum left is sufficient to establish a library much superior to any now existing in the country. And I assert, that the disposition of this money was a particularly good and wise one, and that the institution is eminently calculated to be a benefit and an honor to this city. It is less grand and imposing than the Girard College; there is less of it; but it is also less open to objection, and in some points more calculated to command

respect. How, for instance, would the two institutions strike an intelligent foreigner? An Englishman comes here, or is sent here by authority, to observe the state of education and knowledge among us. According to the natural order of things he is a clergyman, education in England being placed almost entirely in the hands of that class. In the one case, he finds a library open to all decent people and well provided with valuable works of all sorts; he is politely received by the accomplished and learned superintendent, and, after seeing all that is to be seen, is informed that the trustees will be much obliged to him if he can, from his special professional knowledge or otherwise, suggest any books which the library ought to, but does not possess. In the other, he has a very fine view of the *outside* of a grand edifice, which he is not permitted to enter for fear of causing disputes and controversy!

It is not, however, my present intention to elaborate a panegyric upon my grandfather, nor was the vindication of his memory from your attack my only or principal motive for addressing you this letter. That attack was but an individual instance of misrepresentation; there are general opinions broadly announced in your lecture which provoke animadversion—opinions which are often promulgated in disreputable quarters, but which

I never before detected coming from a respectable source.

On your 61st page I find these words: "Vast fortunes are a misfortune to the state. They confer irresponsible power; and human nature, except in the rarest instances, has proved incapable of wielding irresponsible power without abuse. The feudalism of capital is not a whit less formidable than the feudalism of force. The millionaire is as dangerous to the welfare of the community in our day, as was the baronial lord of the Middle Ages."

Such language coming from a man in your position should be characterized as it deserves, without any euphemism or affectation of delicacy. It is perilous nonsense: it is a groundless and wicked absurdity. *How* is the millionaire dangerous to the community? What special privileges has he? What exemption from the law? What attribute of feudalism or aristocracy? In what possible sense is he *irresponsible?* What power does his money give him to infringe on the rights of others, or to force their consciences? What can he do to divert the course of justice, or to modify the expression of the popular voice? Is there a millionaire in New-York or Boston who could change the vote of his own coachman? To talk of the *political* influence of a rich man in this country, is like

talking of a Highlander's trousers, or an anti-renter's honesty, or Northern aggressions on the South, or anything which is notoriously nothing at all. It is a subject proper only for metaphysical treatises like Plato's *Sophist*, which discuss *the existence of non-existences.* Or is the rich man able to pervert justice and warp the integrity of our tribunals? Desire of popularity, and fear of opposing the tide of public opinion, have, it must be owned with shame, sometimes exercised an undue influence on judges and jurors and counsel, but I think it would not be possible to produce, from the annals of our jurisprudence, a single case in which a suitor has obtained more than his due, or a criminal escaped the punishment due him, by the mere power of his wealth. Having had some opportunities of observing what power and influence wealth really does confer among us, I have found it to amount usually to this, that if a man is rich and known to be liberal in the way of entertaining, he will find some half-dozen people to toady him for the sake of his dinners.

In fact, so far from a rich man's having any unfair advantage in the community, he labors under many positive disadvantages; so far from his being to treat others unfairly, he is continually liable to be unfairly treated himself. The popu-

lar prejudice is always against him, whether he is a party in a law-suit, or a mover in any public matter, or whether he merely expresses an opinion. Let *me* relate an anecdote which I do not merely "believe," but *know* to be authentic. Two American gentlemen meet abroad, one a youth just emerging into manhood, with some literary taste and intellectual promise, the other a middle-aged man of the world, with much political and social experience. Says the junior, in the course of a long talk about things at home, "When I return, I mean to write a serious of pamphlets on such and such subjects," (naming certain leading questions of the day.) "You had better save yourself the trouble," replies his older and more experienced friend, "for the very fact of your being a rich man will destroy any weight that your suggestions might otherwise have." Indeed, not only the actual possession, but the bare reputation or suspicion of wealth, will often annihilate a man's public influence, and make him distrusted. A person with wealthy connections and refined habits will readily incur the penalty of being denounced as a *millionaire* and an *aristocrat*—convertible terms of opprobrium with many scribblers here.*

* I do not mean to say that there is no aristocracy in the country—that is to say, no set or sets of men who use

If we look for the cause of this treatment, we shall not be very far wrong in attributing it to the *spirit of envy*, which modern democracy produces and fosters. There has been a great deal said about the peculiar dangers of democracy, and the various abuses to which our political and social forms are prone; but it really does seem to me, that this, which has never to my knowledge been specially dwelt upon by any writer on the subject, is the very worst evil chargeable on democracy. As soon as a man does anything, or has anything done to him, to put him above others in any way, he violates the first article of the democratic creed, "Every man's as good as another."* Instead of a legitimate source of pride, as he would be in most

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their own, so as to abuse their neighbors, who infringe upon other people's rights, and exercise a tyranny over other people's amusements and occupations. There is a sufficiency of *such* aristocracy among us; so far as my observation has extended, it is composed chiefly of the following classes: 1st, Omnibus drivers—2d, Hotel-keepers—3d, Newspaper editors—4th, Blackguards and rowdies generally, such as the people who stormed the Opera House, and drove Macready out of New-York.

* It is hardly necessary to observe, that I do not use the words *democracy* and *democrats* in their technical party sense. I am quite aware that you are called a whig, and sometimes vote with the whigs in Congress.

countries, he becomes an object of suspicion and hatred. We see the greatest and worst development of this feeling in the universally admitted fact, that to be a great statesman, and generally acknowledged as such, is precisely the way *not* to become President of the United States, and the little germs of it are traceable in the petty local dislikes felt for, and annoyances aimed at, any man who happens to have a finer house, larger library, or better appointed equipage, than his neighbors. True, as the spirit of admiration for superiority is natural to man, and not to be altogether eradicated by any adverse influences, there are some kinds of excellence which still command honor among us. In the South and South-West, military glory is at a premium, and the successful general meets with a full appreciation of his merits. In the North and East, literature, up to a certain point, is very popular; indeed, it finds great sympathy as a very excellent democratic pursuit, almost every third man or woman being, in some sense or nonsense of the term, an author. And a literary man stands more chance of being spoiled by flattery, than soured by detraction—unless he should dare to oppose the current of any popular opinion; in that case, all his talent cannot save him. With these exceptions, it may be safely affirmed, that as soon as a man

becomes conspicuous for anything, so soon is he slandered and hated; and of no class of persons is this truer than those whom you stigmatize as "equally dangerous to the community with the baronial lords of the Middle Ages."

Take an obvious example. Our newspapers, which are generally conducted by average specimens of the people at large, which, collectively, exercise an immense influence on public opinion, and in return, pretend with tolerable truth to be a reflex of that opinion, have, with a few honorable exceptions, a special *penchant* for abusing rich men, and inventing or circulating things to their prejudice. If a rich man is in business, of course he is making his money by dishonest practices. If not in business, he must necessarily be idle, and therefore vicious, it being a matter of course that a man cannot be occupied, unless he is visible so many hours a day in a store or office, and equally so, that he must be a votary of dissipation, unless he goes through a certain routine of work every morning. If he gives money for any public object, he is not praised for his liberality, but abused for not giving more. If he spends his wealth in fostering art or literature, he ought to have built hospitals or free-schools with it. If he is in any trouble or affliction, a great shout of joy is set up, and the affair is placarded as much as

possible. Now, these gentlemen of the press know pretty well their own pecuniary interests, whatever may be their ignorance on other important points; and with all their horror of rich men, have a knack of filling their own pockets comfortably; and they would not be so ready to abuse the wealthy, unless it paid to do it.

And now, sir, you, by incorrect and mischievous assertions, made deliberately, and in a most public manner, are doing your best to aid and abet, and increase this prejudice and tyranny of an unjust public opinion.

What can have been your motive or reason, or excuse, for so doing? It is just possible that having, among other hobbies, ridden that of abolition pretty hard, and having become thoroughly imbued with a detestation of the injustice involved in the idea of a slaveholding millionaire, you have come, by that confusion of similar ideas, which is the commonest of American fallacies, to associate *wealth* with *oppression*, so that you deem the factory operative the slave of the factory owner, the servant of the master, and generally the employed of the employer. To this suspicion, a color is lent by the sentence on your next page, "The power of money is as imperial as the power of the sword, and I may as well depend upon another man for my head as for my bread." Now, I will

not stop to expose the inapplicability of such a supposition to our country,—that has been done already often enough. I will only say, *if you really believe this*, then you are the most inconsistent of men in keeping up an agitation in and out of Congress, against Southern slavery—you are a most gratuitous and unwarrantable meddler in pouring out the vials of your wrath on the inhabitants of one part of the country, for practising exactly what exists, by your own statement, under a different form in your own part of the country. And the representatives from Carolina and Georgia, who tell you to go home and mind your own business, for your laboring classes are as badly off as your slaves, will be perfectly in the right. I had always supposed, that when the fierce strife of words arose in our national halls of legislation between Northerner and Southerner, that it was because the white laborer here was *not* to be compared to the black slave there,—because it was a foul wrong and a vile slander, to make the comparison,—because the good people of Ohio had sent "Tom Corwin the waggoner's boy" to the Federal Senate, and the wood-sawyer's son sat next to the ex-President's in the schools of Boston,—that the Rep esentatives of Northern labor—Horace Mann among them—were so eager to repel the taunt and invective of the slaveholder, and to roll

back upon him his arrogant assertion. To be sure, I have not read Congressional speeches very attentively, nor am I curious in discovering how far the meridian under which a man is speaking influences his assertions and arguments. But no! it cannot be. A man like you must know better than this. I am forced to conclude that you were tempted by the euphonious jingle of "bread" and "head," and the desire, like Mr. Pecksniff, of turning an elegant period, without being particularly solicitous that it should mean anything.

Even at the South, it would not be correct to say that wealth exercises a dangerous or injurious influence. The evil is, not that one man holds three slaves, and another three thousand, but that any man holds slaves at all. There is a ruling class and a subject class; the one race oppresses the other; but there is no social or political oppression exercised by particular members of the ruling class over the rest of their body. Among the whites there is as much, or nearly as much equality as at the North. The Virginians, for instance, are known to be all on a level, every man we meet from the state belonging to "one of the first families" in it. But this, by the way.

I was trying to find your reason for a very unreasonable proposition which you had laid down. The first attempt being unsuccessful, we must try

again. A few lines lower, on the same page, (the 62d,) I find this sentence:

"Weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, or even in the clumsy scales of human justice, there is no equity in the allotments which assign to one man but a dollar a day with working, while another has an income of a dollar a minute without working."

The clumsy scales of human justice have always allowed one man to be richer than another. The balance of the sanctuary allows one man to be stronger, handsomer, healthier, wiser, than another. Is inequality in all things injustice? Very possibly you hope to annihilate all these inequalities, by observance of the physical laws, and to make men all equal in health, strength, beauty and intelligence, as well as in property. If your allusion to the Divine government of the world is intended to mean anything, you must have some such vision. As to the human part of the proposition, if, I say again, your assertion means anything, it is mere absolute Socialism. This man lives in a fine house without having to work. I have to work, and am poor. This is unjust to me. I have as good a right to the money as he has, and if ever I grow strong enough, am justified in seizing it. *La propriété c'est le vol.*

It is an old story to expose such fallacies, but

when they are repeated and endorsed by a man of your position and character, it seems necessary to take some notice of them, even at the risk of saying over again what has been better said a thousand times before. What *is* work? Is there no work but carrying a hoe or wielding a spade? Is all work equally valuable; or is the value of work to the community to be measured by the physical labor expended, or the time occupied in it? Supposing one man, by his mechanical ingenuity and study, and enterprize, produces an invention which adds millions every year to the wealth of his country; is it unjust that he should get some droppings of the golden shower, and enjoy a large fortune for the rest of his life? Is it not bare justice and honesty on the part of the nation, acting as between man and man, to allow him this advantage? Nay, more; as he may, in many instances, not have achieved his task till arrived at a time of life when it is too late for him to get the full enjoyment of his worldly wealth, is it unjust that he should be allowed to bequeath it to his nearest and dearest relatives? Such a state of things is a direct analogy with the moral government of the world, under which, as you yourself have taken pains to show, (p. 19,) the bodily and mental defects and excellencies of the parents are very frequently inherited by the chil-

dren. Suppose a man has written a book that will last as long as the language in which it is written, and give pleasure and profit to millions of readers for successive ages. If he happens to get more than a usual share of the good things of the world, ought we to cry out against this as an injustice? Ought we not rather to pray that it might happen oftener? Suppose he practises a literary leisure in the intervals of composition, and cannot positively be said to do anything for some months in the year,—is he entitled to no more indulgence than the hod-carrier at a dollar a day, whose influence upon society is confined to the number of houses he helps to build, unless he chances to break his neighbor's head, and figure in the police reports of the day? The "injustice" will hardly hold good then, I think, any more than the "Feudality." But perhaps rich people are dangerous to the community, from the mischief they do in a negative way, by their idleness. You are terribly severe upon idleness as "the most absurd of absurdities, and the most shameful of shames." But here, again, it is necessary to examine into the signification of our words. By *idleness*, you evidently mean independence—the absence of a fixed, imperative daily occupation, and the freedom to choose and vary one's occupation from day to day. This is clear by your il-

lustration of "wealth that breeds idleness," the English peerage. This example struck me the more, because at the very time of reading your pamphlet, I happened to be in daily communication with a member of that peerage, a very young man, heir apparent to one of the most distinguished titles in his country, and a harder working man of his age, or one in a more complete state of training, physical and mental, I have never met with. He is not obliged to labor for his bread at any fixed occupation, and therefore you would call him a "bivalve" and other hard names, but he does the work of two men every day of his life, and his services to the community of which he is a member, are worth those of a great many day-laborers or clerks put together. I have known or met a number of young men of the same class, not all equally learned or intelligent, but all of them decidedly *men*, who had, by study or exercise, made the most of what natural gifts they possessed, and were very respectably qualified to take part in the government of their country; and would be the first to turn out and fight for it, if it were threatened from abroad.

With regard to the "specimens which are beginning to abound here," I fear it must be conceded that their time is not always so diligently or profitably employed. But they have the excuse that,

owing to the popular prejudice already alluded to, the most natural as well as most honorable path of duty is virtually closed against them.

But let us go a little farther into first principles. I positively deny that the absence of occupation is necessarily in itself a disgraceful absurdity, and I still more positively deny that work is necessarily in itself honorable and profitable. A great deal of idleness is from its very nature innocuous. A great deal of occupation is directly mischievous. One of two brothers lives quietly and lazily in the house of his fathers; the other works all day to pull it down, having no means to provide a new one. He is occupied intensely—but would it not be better for himself and the family, that he should emulate his brother's idleness? A demagogue—lecturer, member of Congress, or otherwise—exerts himself to foster social or sectional prejudices, to set one class, or one interest, or one division of a country, against another; he is very busily employed; but is he not more mischievous in his influence on society than the club-room lounger, who plays billiards half the morning? There are many hard-working people whom it would be a mercy to mankind to keep quiet, and not a few idle people whom I, for one, should be very sorry to see attempting any business. Add to this, that a great deal of what popularly passes for idleness

is in its results very effective performance,* and you have somewhat of a case made out for the man of no fixed daily occupation.

The purport of the preceding paragraphs (somewhat desultory, I confess, but not altogether undesignedly so, from a desire to view the subject in several lights,) is that the capitalists of this country are, neither as a class nor as individuals, possessed of any unjust power in the state, or in any way dangerous to the community—which indeed one would think must be a truism to any man of ordinary intelligence, information and honesty.

Discussing the *powers* of a class naturally brings us to the discussion of their *responsibilities*, since responsibility is directly proportioned to power. And since in this case you exaggerate the power, it is to be expected that you should exaggerate the responsibility also. Since you compare the power of wealthy republicans to that of feudal barons, we may well suppose that you will expect them to exert as much influence on the state of society. But your notion of responsibility

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* "Imagine an active bustling little prætor under Augustus, how he probably pointed out Horace to his sons, as a moony kind of man, whose ways were much to be avoided, and told them it was a weakness in Augustus to like such idle men about him, instead of men of business."—Helps' *Friends in Council.*

is the queerest ever heard of, for it consists in holding the man responsible for precisely that which he does *not* do and cannot prevent.* Because some shameless woman lives by prostitution, it is wrong for Mr. A. to go to the Opera. Because some vagabond gets drunk and beats his wife, Mr. B. "incurs enormous guilt" in buying a Turner or sitting to Gray for his portrait. Because some Irishman, under the baneful direction of his priest, will not let his children go to school, Mr. C. is a monster of iniquity for "walling himself in" with a large library. We are just about as much responsible for these things as you are for the existence of slavery in the state of Georgia, and by the sacrifice of all "our superfluous wealth and time" could do about as much to prevent them as you could to put down slavery by devoting all your spare Congressional pay to buying up the slaves of Mr. Toombs, or by going yourself into the great but barbarous nation of South Carolina, and getting yourself torn to pieces by the savage inhabitants.

Certainly there is one case in which men of fortune and leisure in a large city are responsible for the vice and misery in it—when, by their bad example, they tend to increase both. If they fre-

* Pp. 60 and 82.

quent gambling hells and other haunts of dissipation, if they patronize the black-leg and the bawd, if they waste in dishonor what their fathers honorably acquired—then they, *in common with the members of other classes who participate in these practices*, lie under the awful responsibility of having produced misery by encouraging vice. But unless it can be shown that such melancholy examples are more common in the wealthiest class than in any other, it is unfair and absurd to throw upon it the whole responsibility. And I make bold to say, that whether in point of obedience to the laws of the land or to the requisitions of morality, this much abused class will compare favorably with the rest of society. Those members of it who are still making money, are too much engrossed with their business to do mischief to any one; and if the younger portion has some follies, such as dancing ten hours a day in New-York, or training fast horses in Philadelphia, or making bad copies of good pictures in Boston, these frivolities are injurious only to themselves, and very far from exercising a feudal tyranny over the rest of the community. It would be as reasonable to say that the butterfly was a dangerous member of the animal kingdom, or to hold it responsible for the misdeeds of the lion and the hyena.

I wonder it never occurred to you, that by exaggerating the power of money, you were furnishing a fearful stimulus to the pursuit of wealth for improper motives. True, you may say, "I have furnished the antidote along with the bane;" but the bane affects the very persons who will not be affected by the antidote. You inflame a young man's imagination, by suggesting to him the acquisition of an extra-legal, irresponsible power, giving as a reason for his not wishing to seek wealth, the very thing that will make him desire it; nor does the Hibernian after-thought of exaggerating the responsibility of the irresponsible power mend the matter at all. It is like the play of Jack Sheppard, where the final execution of the robber-hero does not present a moral sufficient to counterbalance the previous fascinating exhibition of his free and easy life.

But there is one power which the rich man has, not only not dangerous, but in the highest degree beneficial to the community. It is the power of encouraging Art and Literature. And since the taste which energizes this power is more usually developed in the second generation than in the first, it is rather to be desired than deprecated, that we had more men *educated to spend money*. I wish most heartily that there were more men among us able to incur the enormous

guilt of having large libraries, and beautiful picture galleries. For as to saying that these things should be the work of the State, which is the dream of some people, it would be as reasonable to suppose, that virtuous laws and institutions could prevail in a nation individually profligate, as that a people can encourage art and literature, if the individuals composing it are semi-literate, (if I may be allowed to coin a word for the occasion,) and unæsthetic.

Here, however, we come to a direct issue. So far from thinking the encouragement of literature and the arts desirable for and glorious to a nation, you view them as comparatively useless, if not altogether pernicious.

This is, after all, our great cause of quarrel. Had it not been for these disparaging remarks of yours, I should probably have remained silent. But, a delighted worshipper of art, and, it would be absurd to say a literary man, but I may say, a constant and devoted student of literature—one who believes these to be two mighty influences toward, and tests of, civilization, is disposed to resent most promptly, from motives of duty as well as feeling, all assaults made upon them by either the Puritan or the Utilitarian. Your remarks, certainly more honest and undisguised than any I

have met with in writers of the same school, go very far to confirm the opinion authorised by many able men, that the present spirit of radicalism, and self-styled "progress," is progress the wrong way, destructive of civilization and cultivation, and altogether barbarizing in its tendency.

On the subject of the Fine Arts, I shall not say much. A certain amount of sympathy with them, and appreciation of them, (which may exist without any practical ability of performance in them,) seems necessary to any person before he can be put on common ground with their advocates. They are like the Spanish mariner in the ballad—

"Yo no digo esta cancion sino a quien comigo va."

"Wouldst thou learn my galley's secret?
With my galley thou must go."

A man may be ignorant of music in a scientific point of view; he may be unable to explain critically its beneficial influence on himself and others; but if he cannot feel, and does not acknowledge any such influence, it seems to me there must be something radically wrong about him. A poet who is usually allowed to be a great master of human nature, though he did live before the spiritual laws were discovered by the craniologists, has said—

"The man who hath no music in his soul,
* * * *
Let no such man be trusted."

I very much fear that Horace Mann has no music in his soul, and is not to be trusted for an opinion on the virtue and value of music. About painting you have said more. Here you lay great stress on an antagonism which has no existence. You extol the beauties of nature, and commend them to our contemplation, instead of those of art.* Now, not only is there no natural antipathy or incompatibility between the two pursuits, but they naturally go together, and reciprocally encourage and help each other. Who is a more ardent admirer and diligent student of nature than the landscape-painter? He could not be a landscape-painter if he were not. This eye for nature is the first requisite in his art. And what makes one more anxious to see a striking or beautiful place, than the sight of a truthful and competent representation of it? People who have learned to appreciate the beauties of art, have acquired, *pari passu*, a deep appreciation of natural beauty. People who systematically despise and ignore art, are ready to practise any barbarity upon nature. I have seen men who,

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* Pp. 49, 50.

standing before Raphael's Transfiguration, audibly wished they had half the money it cost; and I have seen the same men reading newspapers, when they had only to lift their eyes to behold the most gorgeous autumnal sunset. The utilitarian who sneers at the expenditure of five thousand dollars for a picture, would be the first man to build a rag mill over a cascade, or drain a lake for an acre of pasture ground. A Mr. Jervis, engineer of a railroad company, recommended a route which defaces the whole east bank of the Hudson, as far as the road extends, and one of his avowed reasons was, that the appearance of the shore would be improved by cutting away its sharp curves, and filling up its bays! There is a fair specimen of the veneration for nature, that you may expect from an unartistic and unæsthetic man.

But your observations on literature merit a more careful examination and discussion, for the extraordinary fallacies which they involve, and that too on a subject which one cannot suppose you ignorant of, or incompetent to appreciate. The First Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education must be, I should think, to some extent, a literary man. Yet we find you undervaluing literature, because it is not something different from itself, because it is not intimately

connected with something, with which it cannot possibly be intimately connected. You begin with a very *ad captandum* antithesis. "Literature is mainly conversant with the works of man, while science deals with the works of God; and the difference in the subject matter of the two, indicates the difference in their relative value, and in the power and happiness they can respectively bestow"—(p. 51.) The statement is very effective, but it is obtained only by leaving out a considerable portion of the truth on both sides. In the first place, literature is conversant, not only with the *works* of man, but with the *mind* of man, the greatest of all God's works in this world. Here the literary men had the start of the metaphysicians by hundreds and thousands of years. But, further, when the poet celebrates in song the beauties of nature, is he not dealing with the works of God? When the scientific man writes or lectures about pumps, and pulleys, and screws, and levers, and all sorts of mechanism, is he not conversant with the works of man? No doubt, he does frequently deal with the works of God. Mr. Jervis was dealing with the works of God, when he defaced the most beautiful river in the world; and very foul dealing it is sometimes, and a great bore to the said works, and not at all calculated to improve the mind. Suppose I were

to begin an argument with such a sentence as this, "Literature is conversant with mind, while science deals with matter, and the difference in the subject of the two indicates the difference in their respective value." You would cry out against the unfairness of the assumption, but it would be just as fair as yours, which asserts of the whole field of science what is true only of one subordinate department of it—criticism.

"A vast proportion of our literature consists of what had been written, or is a reproduction of what had been written before the truths of modern science were discovered."

And what if it was? So far as this has any bearing on its value, it would be as much to the purpose to say, that it had been written before M. Soyer invented the *omelette à la Beelzebub*, or Horace Greely set up the New-York Tribune. Do men go to the historian, the dramatist, or the poet, to learn natural science, or technical metaphysics? Does it enter into their vocation to teach such things? Did any man who knew the meaning of words ever ask it of them? And if not, how are they, in their literary capacity, concerned by the progress of science? To insist on condemning literature, because it has been developed faster than science, is a most extraordinary instance of inability to discriminate between two

things essentially different. For not only does literature not depend upon science for any of its essentials, but any attempt to transfer the language of the one to the other, is, *ipso facto*, an inconvenience, an absurdity, or a burlesque. In mathematical science, for instance, the excellence of a proposition is, that it be expressed in the fewest words, consistent with intelligibility; indeed, symbols are used as much as possible to the exclusion of words. Any ornament is not merely superfluous, but injurious. The science of law, though not exactly similar in respect of brevity, is equally sedulous to avoid the ornaments and graces of language. And, generally, the unpoetical suggestions and tendencies of science are all but proverbial. When, therefore, you say, that "All science may be invested with the charms of literature," (p. 52,) and that "there is no reason why literature should not hereafter be founded on science," (p. 54,) your conceit is not merely impossible, but farcical. Every word in it is a joke, to which the *Loves of the Triangles*, and Punch's *Lays of the Acids and Alkalies*, are sober seriousness.

That the progress of natural science should have influence on *Theology*, was natural enough; and at one or two epochs there has seemed danger of their interfering. Happily the danger was

only seeming. The wisest men have agreed that Genesis and Geology are reconcilable, and that Joshua's commanding the sun to stand still does not altogether disprove the authenticity of the Old Testament. It is generally admitted that the Scriptures were not written to teach men natural science.

Yet there was at least a speciousness in the claim that our religious standard should conform to the progress of modern scientific discovery; but to insist on such a conformity in our literary standard, or to condemn them for not possessing it, has no such excuse; because, first, the things are totally different in themselves, and secondly, the facts of the case abundantly refute you, it being, for instance, well known that while the ancient Greeks were very badly off for physical science, their literary works take rank with any since produced. If I were to urge against the value of some recent discovery in Medicine, Astronomy, or Mechanics, that it was made in an age which could boast of few great literary men, you would laugh at the irrelevancy of my objection; yet this would be the very counterpart of your charge against the "vast proportion of our literature," that it was written before the truths of modern science were discovered.

Again I find, about a page farther on, that the

same "vast proportion of the existing literature has as little relation to metaphysical truth as the speculations of the schoolmen before the time of Bacon had to physical laws. It is not true that Aristotle and his followers invented laws for nature which she never owned, and explained her phenomena on principles that never existed, than it is that most of those works which we call works of the imagination assume the existence of spiritual laws, such as the spirit of man never knew, and therefore produce results of action and character, such as all experience repudiates. Hence it is, that I would commend science more than literature, as an improver of the mind."

Hence it is. *Voilà parceque votre fille est muette.* The milk in the cocoa-nut is now satisfactorily accounted for. But let us examine the premises of this luminous inference with a little care. "Metaphysical truth." Does this refer to mere technical and formal metaphysics, or to those practical metaphysics which constitute what is called a knowledge of character and human nature, and enable the writer to portray human nature accurately. If to the latter, it is positively incorrect and contrary to the facts of the case. Have the great poets, dramatists and novelists, from Homer and Sophocles to Shakespeare and Scott, displayed an ignorance of human nature,

and misrepresented it? Are there any evidences that the writers of the present or coming generation will surpass them in this respect? If it refers to the former, it is altogether irrelevant, and but a repetition of your former fallacy of confusion. But even if it were not, are you certain that all existing *science* has a correct relation to metaphysical truth. Do mathematics and metaphysics, for example, always walk hand in hand? I have seen mathematical text-books of reputation, in which fundamental mechanical propositions, such as the Parallelogram of Forces, were proved by arguing in a circle. When it comes to the Doctrine of Chances, which involves metaphysical as well as mathematical elements, your mere mathematicians make the wildest work, as any one who has the good fortune to be a good mathematician and metaphysician both will tell you. And in one of the best and best known metaphysical works of the day, Mills' *System of Logic*, some of the most prominent examples of fallacies are taken from *received principles among physical philosophers*, such as the Principle of the Sufficient Reason.

But now comes the overwhelming paradox and anticlimax of all.

"Gall, Spurzheim and Combe have done for metaphysics, or the science of mind, as great a

work as Bacon did for physics, or the laws of matter."

This sentence, I must own, not only staggered, but absolutely upset me, and it took me some time to recover from it. Well, thought I, many hard things have been said against the sciences, but it was left for Mr. Mann to give them the unkindest cut of all, and that under the treacherous disguise of friendship. He has thrown down literature and the arts under their feet for them to trample on, and it is only to degrade them the more by setting up over their heads in the first seat the very equivocal science of Craniology, or, as it boastfully styles itself, Phrenology. Verily, if the great scientific lights of the world, the great chemists, natural historians and astronomers of Europe, were to hear this, methinks they would cry out most lustily to be delivered from such friends. They would agree that it was a decided case of *non tali auxilio.*

One good, however, such as it was, accrued to me from perusing this wonderful sentence. It threw a little light, dim to be sure, but still a little, on a portion of your 51st page, which at first, not pretending to understand the language in which it was written, I had passed over as a mere blank, the words conveying no definite idea to me.

" By far the larger part of all histories, a great

portion of epic poetry, and almost all martial poetry, are addressed to the brutish propensities of combativeness and destructiveness. But physical science addresses itself to the noble faculty of causality, and the kindred members of its group, including the mathematical powers; and ethical science addresses itself both to causality and to conscientiousness, and seeks also the sacred sanction of veneration for whatever it teaches."

This, it now appears, is the comparison of literature and science according to the craniological standard; and it reminds me of a craniologist I once heard lecture, who argued that Newton and Pitt and Brougham were not by any means great men, because they were deficient in certain "organs." Still, however, it is not perfectly satisfactory, and leaves room for question and comment. For instance, are "combativeness and destructiveness" necessarily and invariably pernicious attributes, and if so, why is your model young man, some twenty pages farther on, to "combat hand to hand with some of those terrific monsters that infest society"? Or is the larger part of all history to be disregarded and thrown aside by the young man desirous of improving his mind, on account of its appealing to these brutish propensities? Or is the new *régime* to eliminate all the combative and destructive part

out of history? I do not pretend to answer. *Duvus sum non Œdipus.* If the votaries cannot explain themselves, we, the outsiders, are not called on to interpret them. But it seems probable that the last supposition may be the correct one, from what follows, where you say that "ethical philosophy and education, as well as several other things, can never be properly understood but in the light of their (Spurzheim and Gall's) philosophy." Now, as this philosophy was only invented in the year 1809, it follows that before that time there was no proper understanding of education or ethical science, a supposition very flattering to the vanity of the disciples of progress, but not exactly confirmed by the record of history or the experience of the student's researches.

Once more,

"As the science of zoology has hunted krakens, phœnixes, unicorns and vampires [?] from the animal kingdom; as the science of astronomy has swept pestilential and war-portending comets, and all the terrors and the follies of astrology, from the sky; as a knowledge of chemistry has made the notion of charms and philters and universal remedies, and the philosopher's stone, ridiculous and contemptible; as an improved knowledge of the operations of nature around us

has banished fairies, and gnomes, and ghosts and witches, and a belief in dreams and signs, from all respectable society; [how comes it then that so many craniologists believe in the Rochester knockings?] so will an analytical knowledge of the faculties of the human mind, of their special functions and ends, and of their related objects in the world of matter and in the world of spirit, sweep into forgetfulness four-fifths of what is called literature." (Pp. 53–4.)

Now that four-fifths, and even a greater proportion of the books composing the current literature of the day, are destined to oblivion, there can be no doubt. But this is not true of works on literature alone, it is equally so of works on the sciences. They have the same elements of decay, their multiplication beyond the power of perusal, and the varying nature of their subject-matter—the latter indeed to a greater extent than any merely literary productions. The discoveries continually made in the physical sciences must render a number of the books on them obsolete; so must the discoveries and fashions (for there is a great deal of fashion among mathematicians, though they are not generally suspected of it,) in pure mathematics. No schools of literature have succeeded and dethroned one another so fast as the schools of modern meta-

physics. Astronomers tell us that some fixed stars may never be visible on this earth until after they have ceased to exist; and in like manner, a German writer on mental philosophy is frequently exploded and his theory upset by his countrymen, just as England, France, and America are beginning to take an interest in him. Nor do the writings of the craniologists in any way influence or accelerate the destruction of our present literature, except by their own numercial addition to the perishing portion of it. As to your suggestion of craniologizing all future literature, it is the essence of farce. One hardly knows how to attempt treating such a proposition seriously. To be sure, there are "reforms" equally absurd to keep it in countenance. Not very long ago I chanced to see the writings of some people who called themselves (if I recollect rightly) *Phonetics*, modestly claimed to have invented a perfect alphabet, and seriously proposed to alter the spelling of the whole language, and oblige every existing book to be rewritten and reprinted.

Here, then, we arrive at the great conclusions of your advice to young men, which I have found it convenient to consider in a nearly inverse order—a dogma, that craniology is at the head of all desirable human knowledge—another dogma, that rich men are dangerous to the community,—a de-

lence, as alike compatible with a love of literature and a corresponding advancement in the arts and sciences,

I remain

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES ASTOR BRISTED.

New York, May 15, 1850.

DATE

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